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ABSTRACT

Perspectives on testing and affirmative action are considered. The following issue areas are addressed: the validity and fairness of admission tests; information relevant to the admission of students that is not readily scored or quantified and that may be obtained through interviews, recommendations, accomplishments, and other information sources; following a strategy to ensure diversity in the student body; and the need for incorporating the concept of educational due process in admissions. It is suggested that the predictions based on tests and grades are not biased against minority groups and that the real barriers to affirmative action are not tests but complacency and lack of courage of many leaders in education. It is further suggested that it is critically important to strengthen the nonquantitative admissions data, and to move to a broadened view of talent, and more defensible procedures in selecting students who have the personal qualities and characteristics that fit the educational objectives and responsibilities of higher education institutions. It is proposed that efforts to achieve diversity in the student body might provide a wide diversity within different environments for learning and might nurture a broad range of personal and societal objectives. Educational due process requires that institutions adhere to good admissions practices, including the following: clear admissions policies that are described in relation to the goals of the institution, public disclosure of admissions criteria, use of the same admissions process for all applicants considered for the same program; and policies allowing exceptions to admissions criteria for particular classes of applicants, are publicly articulated with attention to the legal implications. (SW)

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THE ROLE OF TESTING IN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

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The Role of Testing in Affirmative Action

Winton H. Manning

Opening

The eyes of the world have in recent weeks turned to Rome where two recent conclaves of the College of Cardinals have occurred. It may have escaped your attention that among the princes of the Church that gathered in solemn council is one who bears the name of Cardinal Sin--Jaime Sin of the Philippines, to be exact. If the Church has seen fit to include a Cardinal Sin in its conclave, I suppose the planners of this conference should be forgiven for seeking out a psychologist and researcher whose career has been intimately connected with testing, to address this conference.

I am your Cardinal Sin, because as you shall shortly see, I will be presenting some technical research data to you--a style of presentation that is distinctly not eloquent or moving in the way demonstrated by our speakers of this morning.

Despite the turmoil, and the fitful progress of the past decade, it is clear to all of us that the task creating equal educational opportunity is hardly begun. A few statistics will illustrate the progress, and the gap that remains to be closed (CEMREL, Inc., 1978).

- In 1950, Blacks were completing only a median of 8.6 years of education. An astounding 80% dropped out of high school and only 20% graduated. By 1977, Blacks completed a median of 12.6 years of schooling, vs. 12.9 for all persons. The drop-out rate fell from 80% to 26%, and the percentage of high school graduates had increased to 74% (as compared to 85% for all persons)--a threefold increase over these 27 years.

- In 1960, 18 and 19 year old whites were twice as likely to be enrolled in college (30% vs. 15%.) By 1975, the rates had increased for

both groups, but whites were still 50% more likely (38% vs. 25%) to be enrolled in college. Over this same period, discrepancies in white/black college graduation rates shifted from a ratio of 5:1 to a ratio of 3:1 --still a large gap.

- More sobering is the fact that nationwide, about 11% of all children under 18 years of age still lived in poverty, but 40% of Black children are in poverty families and Black family income is still only about 60% of white.

These and other statistics are familiar to you, but it is useful to be reminded of the enormous gap which still remains in educational opportunity and resources between majority and minority groups.

Given these circumstances, it would indeed be surprising if ability tests, which reflect the cumulative effects of educational experience of students over 12 to 16 years of schooling did not also reflect differences between the white majority and minority groups who are still beset with poverty, discrimination and the multi-faceted effects of social class and caste systems. Nevertheless, controversy rages around the question of the role of tests in college admission. Indeed, controversy over the role of tests has characterized educational debate for over 75 years.

This is an exceedingly complicated topic--yet perhaps not so confounding as it may seem to be, if we approach the issues from the standpoint of data, rather than rhetorical argument.

I propose to approach the problem in this way, by dealing with four aspects of the problem--aspects that have been illuminated by the Bakke case.

The four problems I want to address are:

1. The strengths--and limitations of tests; that is, what do we know about the validity and fairness of admissions tests;

2. The problem of strengthening "soft data," that is, what is the state of affairs regarding use of other data used in reaching admissions decisions, such as interviews, and other subjective (rather than objective) assessments;

3. The problem of ensuring diversity in the community of learners, that is, what are some of the social consequences of pursuing one strategy or another in admissions;

4. The need for incorporating the concept of educational due process in admissions.

1) Validity of tests:

- Are tests valid?
- How well do they predict success in college or graduate school?
- What factors influence observed validity?
- Are tests biased against minority groups?

These are samples of questions that are endlessly debated, it seems. I'd like to waik through a series of slides in order to set a context for our discussion of these issues.

[Slides] - See Appendix

Allow me to summarize these points concerning validity and fair use of tests in admission.

- The predictions based on tests and grades are not biased against minority groups.

- We must remember the tests and grades do not fully define what we mean by talent, nor are they by any means infallible.

- So far as tests and grades are concerned it is a vain hope, at this stage in our development as a society, that the numbers will conveniently arrange themselves so that we can avoid questions of race and affirmative action in admissions.

- The convenient rationalizations one so often hears about tests may reflect an unwillingness to face up to the issue of affirmative action. A commitment to the effort to bring victims of racial discrimination into the mainstream of education and the professions requires a decent sense of outrage--if there is a will, a way can be found.

- The real barriers to affirmative action are not tests but complacency and lack of courage of many leaders in education. Now that the court has said race may be taken into account--are we willing to do so? Are we committed to do that? That is the root question.

2) Soft Data

I would now like to move on to consideration of the role of other assessments of candidates for admission--assessments that some have termed "soft data" of admissions.

In my report for the Carnegie Council (1977), I urged the importance of using additional admissions criteria beyond test scores and grades, not because these objective measures are invalid--their usefulness has been

demonstrated through hundreds of research studies--but because I believe it is important for institutions to have a broad view of talent, and that they give appropriate attention to those personal characteristics of studies that they believe to be especially relevant to the unique objectives of their programs.

Now that we have the Bakke decision, it is even more critical that institutions develop and maintain a wide variety of admissions information that is defensibly relevant to the institution's objectives. Many criteria beyond test scores and grades are used at present, though their use is often subjective and unsystematic. In this sense, they are the "soft data" of admissions because they are typically not objective or quantifiable, and they are vey often unreliably observed.

Let me elaborate a bit more on what I mean by "soft data" in admissions. I would suggest that the term might usefully refer to information relevant to the admission of students that is not readily scored or quantified, but is subject to reliable assessment under proper conditions. In general this means reliance on informed, systematic judgment. A prime example would be the admission officer's holistic impression of an applicant's character and background based upon: interviews, recommendations, autobiographical essays, records of experience, outstanding accomplishments, and evidence of unusual strength of character, or sheer doggedness in the face of obstacles (including especially racial experience in contending with obtacles of discrimination,) etc. What is too often the case now is that such judgments are not systematic, nor are they checked for evidence of reliability or validity--paradoxically, the use of expert judgment in admissions is fairly primitive even though widely used.

What needs to be done? If such supplemental criteria are to receive adequate emphasis in selective admissions, the rationale and justification must be carefully and convincingly demonstrated in relation to accepted objectives of institutions. Appropriate assessment methods will need to be developed. Some of these new assessments will need to be designed so that they can be carried out locally; some will likely need central support services from testing agencies. In the current climate of public scrutiny of the admissions process, great care will be necessary to implantnew assessment procedures in an admissions process that has desirable characteristics.

This is a large task that will require very substantial research and development of the most practical sort. It will take time and it will require the close involvement of institutions. I believe it is an inevitable adjustment higher education will have to make, but it is not likely to be easy. But, I feel it is critically important to strengthen the "soft data of admissions," and to move to a broadened view of talent, and more defensible procedures in selecting students who have the personal qualities and characteristics that fit the educational objectives and responsibilities of higher institutions.

3. Ensuring Diversity in the Community of Learners

I would like now to turn to the matter of ensuring diversity in the student body - a concern addressed in my Carnegie report, and given considerable attention in the opinion of Justice Powell in Bakke.

All knowledge is shared experience; its acquisition is an overwhelmingly social act. But the business of higher education is not exclusively concerned with the transmission of a cultural heritage of knowledge and

skills, as important as this may be. The provision of conditions that promote the development of the inner resources of the individual is equally important. The question of what should be the basis for admission to college, or graduate and professional schools is intimately related to the problem of creating the optimal conditions for assuring (1) the transmission of information from society to its novices, and (2) furthering the individual's potential for self-development.

Of these two objectives, the first may be less dependent for its realization on the existence of a particular community of persons who contemporaneously share in the process of learning, while interacting together in a social group. Indeed, neither the movement toward independent study, nor the increasing automation of learning by means of computer assisted instuction would be possible if this were not so.

The second objective, that of self-discovery, personal growth, and the acquisition of attitudes and values necessary to function as a lifelong learner depends in many ways upon the participation of the individual in a community of persons, who serve both as stimuli and as setting for this kind of learning and development.

As Justic Powell pointed out, much of learning (and socialization into a profession) is dependent on interactions between and among students and faculty. But we must bear in mind that diversity in admissions creates only a paotentiality for "community." The contribution of diversity cannot be realized in practice unless the educational program deliberately links this potential of diversity to create within students a new breadth of vision, an openness to ideas from unfamiliar sources,

and an increased awareness of the pulls and tugs in a society that appears to have no uniform aspirations. Efforts to achieve diversity in admissions, particularly racial and ethnic diversity, are properly conceived as a foundation upon which institutions may build, in their effort to provide true excellence in educational programs.

Present admissions procedures are heavily weighted toward the first of these objectives - the transmission of knowledge - in that the use of grades, and aptitude and achievement tests is predicated on the assumption that information transmission will be more optimally carried on if the community of learners is reduced to some degres in its variability and matched to the demands of the institution's curriculum. Furthermore, information transmission is conceptually more closely allied to cognitive domains and for that reason we typically find the substantial validity of cognitive ability measures for achievement staturated criteria.

The process of recruiting and admitting students should, it seems to me, also promote the formation of communities of learners that would ensure a wide diversity within different environments for learning, and would nurture a broad range of personal and societal objectives beyond information transmission alone. The question of formulating supplementary or alternative bases to achievement and ability measures is, therefore, most properly addressed as a need to respond to both of these two fundamental objectives of higher education--personal development as well as transmission of knowledge.

A principal promise of assessment of soft data, used in combination with grades and tests of aptitude and achievement, may be in assisting students to seek and find learning environments that foster personal

self-development as an objective as worthly of attainment as the traditional goal of transmitting knowledge. Admissions information systems that mediate student and institutional decisions within this exanded framework constitute a means for making the process of admission more planful and rational, recognizing that values, attitudes and a sense of purpose are as necessary to effective functioning as an educated person as command of a body of knowledge.

I should now like to turn to consideration of another "message" of the Bakke case--the critical imporance of developing the concept of "educational due process" in admissions. (Manning, 1977; Gellhorn and Hornby, 1974, Willingham, 1978)

4. Educational Due Process in Admissions

In my paper for the Carnegie Council I made the following statement:

> "Bakke has cast a cold and relentless beam of light upon an area of institutional policy making--admissions--that has for too long lingered in the shadows. It is not merely for the benefit of applicants that admissions policies and procedures need illumination. Rather, the gatekeeping function of higher education requires that connections between stated institutional missions and goals on the one hand, and admissions policies and procedures on the other, be understood by various constituencies the institution serves. Some process akin to accreditation may be needed, in which an institution's admissions policies, procedures and practices are documented, carefully assessed, and publicly evaluated by independent authorities. If the pursuit of fairness in admission to higher education is to have

> lasting, practical significance ... admissions--no less than other areas of educational policy--should demonstrably express the values of the larger society, not only at the level of broad generalizations, but at the level of specific working principles." (Manning, 1977, p. 41-42)

Higher education institutions can legitimately claim rights to autonomy and broad discretion in their admissions decisions. Nevertheless, both Bakke and De Funis have revealed some practices that need to be strengthened and others that need to be abandoned. A primary consideration that must govern admissions policies, I believe, is a concept of "educational due process," as I called it in my Carnegie Council paper. Unless the concept of "educational due process" is articulated by higher education, and incorporated into their policies, we risk the stultifying consequences of the litigation that will ensue. The lack of demonstrable, systematic, clearly documented guidelines for making judgments about applicants is a keenly felt issue in all quarters of society. It would be infinitely preferred for institutions voluntarily to strip away the curtain of obscurity that too often veils their actions in admissions rather than to look to resolution of these matters in the courts.

I believe that educational due process requires that institutions adhere to ten Principles of Good Practice in Admissions. These are:

1. Educational institutions should clearly describe their admissions policies and explicitly state how these policies are related to the goals and objectives of the institution.

2. Institutions should publicly describe their admissions criteria, and provide information to applicants sufficient to permit students to make a reasonable estimate of the likelihood of their meeting these standards.
3. Whatever criteria are used, the educational institution should routinely allow applicants the procedural opportunity to demonstrate that those particular criteria or standards are inappropriate for assessing their qualifications.
4. Institutions should use the same admissions process for all candidates considered for the same program.
5. Where exceptions to uniformity of process, criteria and standards are made for particular classes, of applicants, this policy should be publicly articulated with particular attention to the legal restraints on such actions.
6. The criteria employed in the admissions process must be validated--that is, demonstrably shown to measure qualities relevant to the legitimate educational objectives of the educational program. Additionally, criteria should not be used which cannot be shown to be reliably assessed.
7. Upon request, a rejected applicant should be given a statement of the reason(s) for his or her rejection, and a means of appeal by the applicant if he or she challenges the institution's explanation.
8. Selection criteria used by institutions should represent a reasonably broad array of those qualities shown to be relevant rather than relying solely upon a single index of competence derived from ability tests and grades.

9. Institutions should ensure that all those who participate in the process of implementing admissions decisions are trained and competent to perform the complex task of evaluating candidates for admission in a fully satisfactory way.
10. Institutions should periodically invite external audit of their admissions policies and practices in order to assure the public and other constituencies that the process that actually goes on is in conformity with publicly stated policies, principles and procedures.

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Implementation of these principles will not be easy. It will require that many higher education institutions make a substantially larger investment of resources in the conduct of the admissions process than they are accustomed to do. For some institutions, it will require a major overhaul of their policies and practices, entailing an even larger financial commitment--not an easy step to contemplate in these days of lean budgets.

Conclusion

These four broad "messages" of the Bakke--using tests wisely - not woodenly-- strengthening the soft data of admissions, recognizing the role of diversity in creating a lively community of learners, and implementing concepts of due process in admissions--exist in some tension with one another. It is often the "soft data" whose use is hidden from public view; thus secrecy serves to cloak unreliable--even arbitrary--actions. Yet it is by way of the "soft criteria" that the vitiating effects of a narrow, wooden admissions policy are avoided. Efforts in all four areas--improving test use, strengthening

soft data, and giving attention to the educational benefits of diversity in the community of learners and educational due process must be pursued as parallel efforts, for each is inextricably linked with the other, and all are necessary to the maintenance of institutional vitality and public confidence. Together they provide a foundation for the effort to create institutions that not only serve students and faculty, but the nation.

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